

MARKETING IN ACTION

SUCCESS STORY FOR SPRAY-ON FOAM OVEN-CLEANER

From Our Special Correspondent

A household cleaning product which first came on the market just a year ago has probably led to the largest increase in aerosol pack sales since the introduction of hairsprays three to four years ago.

The product—Shift—was launched by Phillips, Scott and Turner in Britain as the first foam oven-cleaner in an aerosol pack which was simple to apply, capable of reducing the task to about three minutes, while being harmless to the skin.

A trail of different versions followed in the wake of what appears to be one of the most outstanding of recent marketing successes. As a result, some 20 brands of specialist oven cleaners now compete for a share of a once modest market which has been expanding by 300 to 400 per cent within a year. Shift is claimed to account for a 76 per cent market share. Next come Holt's with the bulk of the remaining 24 per cent.

Bex Bissell launched a competitor in the Midlands recently and are expected to extend it on a national scale, while Drummer have a product so far largely confined to Lancashire. Whereas Holt's are estimated to have the bulk of 24 per cent share of the market overall, they are well entrenched in London and the south. In these areas their share is likely to be much higher.

Phillips, Scott and Turner began test marketing Shift in eight representative towns last March to determine the level of housewives' acceptance and repeat buying, to assess the effectiveness of their advertising approach and to judge whether enough sales could be generated to justify big-scale marketing and the necessary investment. Initial market research had demonstrated that there was a need for such a product in this area of household cleaning. The subsequent tests were backed by substantial local press advertising, expenditure

being based on estimates of potential sales.

Retailers and housewives immediately reacted favourably. After three months' test marketing which produced highly encouraging results, followed by extensive consumer research to assess attitudes to the new product, the company decided to launch Shift nationally. It was an exceptionally short testing period on which to base such a decision and to take the risks involved.

In July it embarked on a 10-week "selling in" phase to ensure the widest retail distribution before beginning national advertising the next September. Its own sales organization introduced the product to grocers throughout the country. But to introduce it to the bulk of independent hardware outlets, which had not hitherto handled any of the company's range of products, a contingent of representatives was engaged from Sales Force, the contract selling organization, who accomplished the task in several weeks.

BETTER THAN EXPECTED

Overall trade reaction and sales were even better than had been expected. As a new development in oven cleaning, the product was welcomed, too, by the gas and electricity authorities. By September, a high level of national distribution had been achieved, and national press and television advertising could begin.

One of the first—somewhat embarrassing—consequences was that demand outstripped the company's most optimistic sales forecasts and the scope of its production resources. But as large-scale production became possible and demand continued to increase—a position largely attributed to the weight of advertising and level of distribution—falling production costs enabled the firm to offer a larger pack, with 21 per cent more content, without increasing the price.

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